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## THE LAND OF JESUS

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REV. ALLAN HOBEN, PH.D.  
Detroit, Mich.

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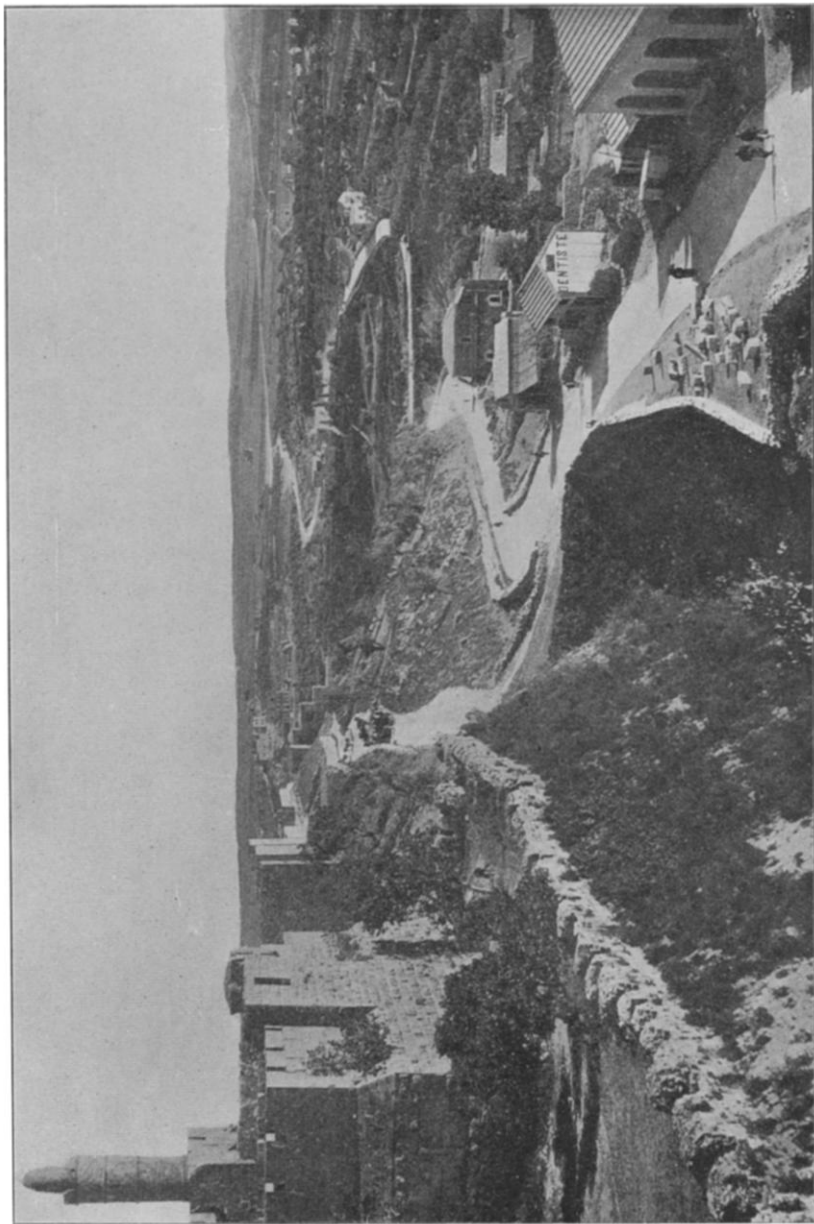
There is no intrinsic holiness in the Holy Land, or soul-saving merit in the study of it. But a knowledge of its physical characteristics and political status is of great help to every teacher of the Bible, and the ability, with lively but restrained imagination, to impart such knowledge to one's pupils would go far toward lifting from the study of the life of Jesus that haze of remoteness and unreality which for so many of our pupils still lies over it.

Since Palestine is smaller than Vermont or New Hampshire, the Sunday-school pupil will easily realize that it has played a rôle in the world's history and possesses a significance for humanity quite out of proportion to its size. Small, indeed, but central and strategic; for over it, as over a highway, Asia and Africa transported their products and led their commanding armies. "There is probably no older road in all the world than that which is still used by caravans from the Euphrates to the Nile through Damascus, Galilee, Esdraelon, the maritime plain, and Gaza." This thoroughfare, and others hardly less important, could be seen from the hills about Christ's native town, so that geographically he was not isolated from the currents of contemporary life.

The physical features of this land,<sup>1</sup> which the world will always associate with Jesus, lie in five parallels: the coast, the maritime plain, the central range, the Jordan valley, and the eastern range. The most effective and interesting way of giving to children a real knowledge of this land is to supply the class with some sand, clay, and bits of stone, and to let them make their own relief map of the land. They will thus fix its features permanently in mind.

As we begin to build the sandy coast south from Carmel we must

<sup>1</sup> See the map opposite p. 416. For wall maps of Palestine suitable for class use, see p. 478, and the *Biblical World*, Vol. XIII, p. 413; for hand maps, *ibid.*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 273, 274.



THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

refuse to welcome ships in any natural harbor save that for small craft in the projecting reef at Joppa; and as for artificial harbors, even that glorious one which Herod built at Cæsarea,<sup>2</sup> the sea vents its spite on them as if to reciprocate the inhospitality of the land and to suffer no compromise or peaceable agreement. "Mind your own affairs," says the sea to all this section of Palestine; "I



GENERAL VIEW OF NAZARETH

am not your opportunity, as of Britain, but your boundary." North of Carmel it is somewhat better, and the shallow Bay of Acre has a natural harbor at Haifa, and one half choked with sand at Accho. In contrast to all this, we have Tyre farther north, with its Egyptian harbor and Sidonian port; and, beyond that, Sidon, affording an equally good double roadstead. From this, even a child can understand why Phœnicia was a prime maritime power, and why the Hebrews did not take to the sea.

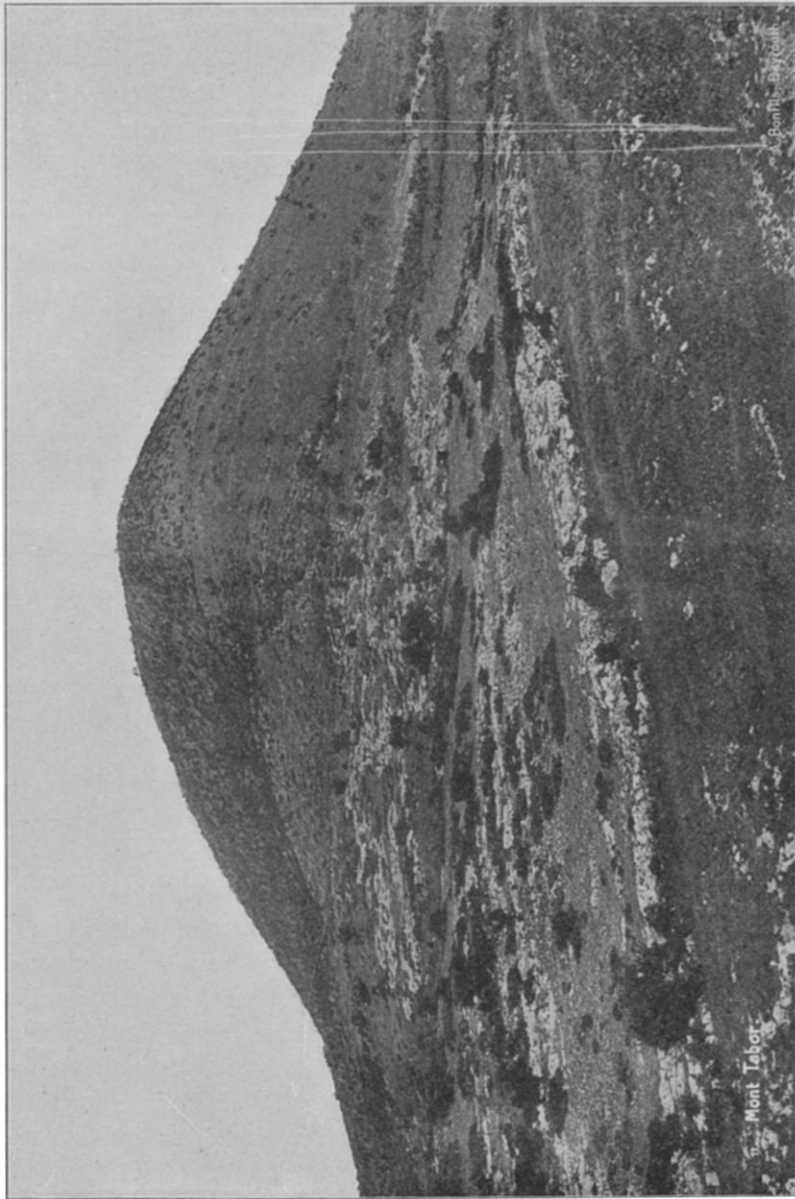
We then build the maritime plain. From Phœnicia the plain,

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XV, ix, 6.

attenuated to some two hundred yards of beach and boulders, creeps around Carmel and, widening, stretches away south. At first there are marshes and sand-dunes, and then, beyond the Crocodile River, the beautiful plain of Sharon, with a maximum width of twelve miles and a length (including the apex north of the Crocodile River) of about sixty miles. South of the Nahr Rubin the plain sweeps on for forty miles, and with a more generous width. This is Philistia.

Returning to Carmel, which is only 500 feet high at the coast, we may regard it as a sort of index finger of the great central range, the third main feature of the land. Tracing this narrow, arched finger back some nine and a half miles, we reach the knuckle (1,742 feet). and then it flattens down in a softer and broader formation, failing to connect with the central range in such a way as to cut off the maritime plain from the plain of Esdraelon, of which Carmel is the precipitous western border.

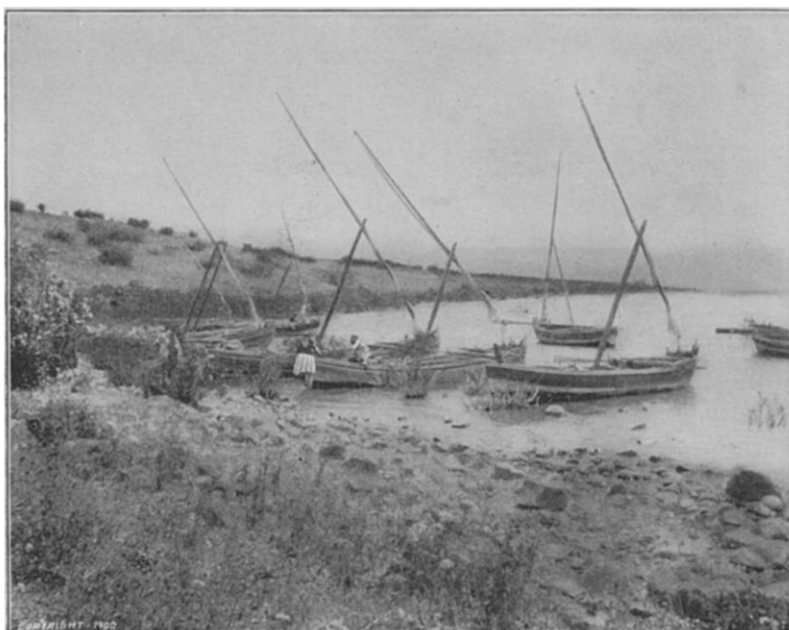
Perhaps the most logical place at which to begin the central range is in the southwest, and here we will build, on the eastern border of the maritime plain, an amphitheater of foothills looking toward the sea, and cut off from the steeper ascent into the Judean hills by a series of valleys. This foothill country is called the Shephelah. East of this the central range must be made more steep, and toward the south it falls away into the barren, semi-mountainous region known as the Negeb. But the main feature is the Judean hill-country, 2,500 feet above the sea, and forming the secure location for Jerusalem. To the southeast is the wilderness of Judea—a rocky, dreary waste reaching to the Dead Sea. Northward from Judea the range soon becomes more broken, and the towns have not the natural protection afforded Judea and its capital. The descent from the broken hills of Ephraim, with their Mount Gerizim, Mount Ebal, and Gilboa, is more simple and open than is the case in Judea; and then toward the north our central range is intercepted to form the wonderful plain of Esdraelon running in from the Jordan valley. This great triangle, erected on a southern base of twenty miles, with sides fifteen miles long, pushes its northeastern apex against Mount Tabor, whose height of 1,843 feet tells us that the central range has found and reasserted itself. Beyond this the range, swinging away through upper Galilee, culminates at the northern limit of the land



MOUNT TABOR, SEEN FROM THE PLAIN OF ESDRAELON

in Lebanon, whose peaks are crowned with snow during seven months of the year, and whose river-sources cause Galilee to surpass her southern neighbors in fertility.

East from Lebanon and beyond the Leontes is a stream coming down from the Anti-Lebanons, and this stream leads us to the fourth main feature of the country, the Jordan valley. Generous tribu-



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BOATS ON THE SEA OF GALILEE

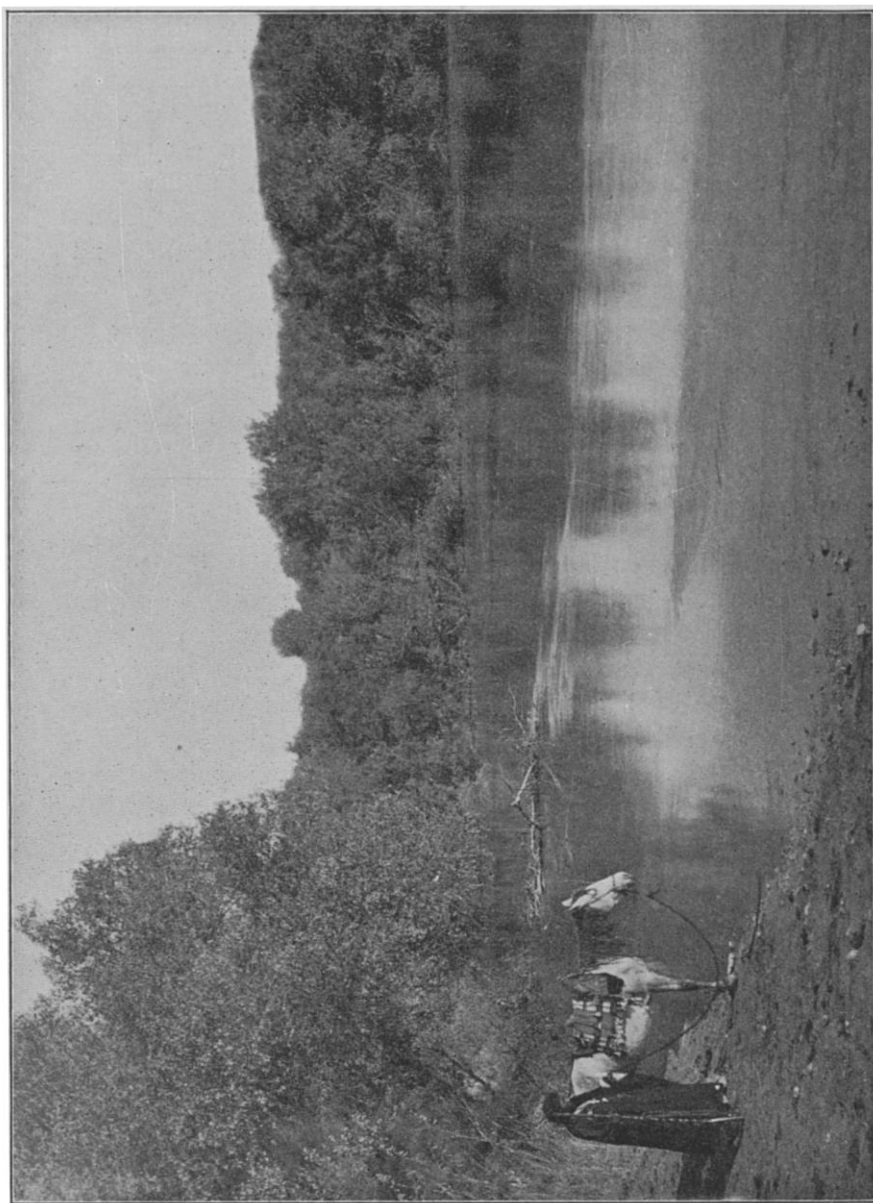
taries from the base of snow-crowned Hermon, especially at Tell-el-Kadi and Baniyas, augment this inferior stream, which, after some show of impetuosity, sulks its way through a sedgy and impassable river bottom into Lake Huleh. This is a bit of water three by four miles in area, and lying at an elevation of only seven feet above sea-level. But the Jordan soon throws off any inclination to loiter here. It rushes southward, making a descent of seventy feet a mile for ten miles, and pushes itself with such vigor into the Sea of Galilee that that well-known lake of six by thirteen miles is at a loss whether to claim the river or to allow it to pass clean through, so hasty and

unsociable is its career. But, having now reached a depth of 680 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, the river proceeds somewhat more deliberately to the Dead Sea, sixty-five miles south. Through all this distance, except opposite the plain of Esdraelon, it is hemmed in by mountain ranges on either side. The valley of the lower Jordan through which the river winds has a torrid climate from early spring to late autumn, and varies in width from three to seven miles. The river itself is from thirty to eighty yards wide, and when not in flood has an occasional depth of four to five feet; but, owing to the great number of channels which so frequently divide it, there is not water enough to float a small boat one hundred yards at a time. There are some falls and rapids and some tributaries which in the rainy season are very turbulent, as is the river itself, and wash down stones and trees. But altogether it is a muddy and unattractive stream, and so numerous are its twists and turns that it converts the distance of sixty-five miles as the crow flies into two hundred miles of desultory meandering. At length, after passing through the Arabah or desert<sup>3</sup> north of the Dead Sea, it deposits its silt in the bitterest of all waters, and, in the equatorial heat of this wonderful fissure of the earth's crust, passes off into the air in the six and a half million tons of water which daily ascend in vapor from this sterile and silent sea. So great is the evaporation, and so long has it continued that the water of the Dead Sea holds in solution five times the quantity of solids that is found in ordinary sea-water. The surface of the Dead Sea is 1,292 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, which is only fifty miles distant, and the bottom of the sea at the northeastern corner is almost as far below its surface. The southern end of the sea is shallow. Its length is about forty-six miles; its average width, about ten.

The fifth main feature of the land, the eastern plateau, consists of a 2,000-foot wall above the Jordan valley and, back of this escarpment, high plains stretching off into the Arabian desert. This wall is broken by the Arnon, emptying into the Dead Sea, the Jabbok, midway between this and the Sea of Galilee, and the Yarmuk, a few miles south of the Sea of Galilee. From south to north we have: Moab, Ammon, Gilead, the Decapolis, and Gaulonitis.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:4, 5.





THE RIVER JORDAN NEAR JERICO

Even by this very imperfect survey of the land we are impressed, not only with the natural security of Judea, but with the fact that, corresponding to the physical geography, there must be a great variety in the climate and flora of Palestine.

In Palestine there is every climate between the subtropical of one end of the Jordan valley and the sub-Alpine above the other end. There are palms in Jericho and pine forests in Lebanon. In the Ghôr, in summer, you are under a temperature of more than 100° Fahrenheit, and yet you see glistening the snow-fields of Hermon. All the intermediate steps between these extremes the eye can see at one sweep from Carmel—the sands and palms of the coast; the wheat-fields of Esdraelon; the oaks and sycamores of Galilee; the pines, the peaks, the snows of Anti-Lebanon. How closely these differences lie to each other! Take a section of the country across Judea. With its palms and shadoofs the Philistine plain might be a part of the Egyptian delta; but on the hills of the Shephelah which overlook it we are in the scenery of southern Europe. The Judean moors which overlook them are like the barer uplands of central Germany. The shepherds wear sheepskin cloaks and live under stone roofs, for sometimes the snow lies deep. A few miles farther east, and we are down on the desert among the Bedouin, with their tents of hair and their cotton clothing; a few miles farther still, and we drop to torrid heat in the Jordan valley; a few miles beyond that, and we rise to the plateau of the Belkâ, where the Arabs say “the cold is always at home.” Yet from Philistia to the Belkâ is scarcely seventy miles.<sup>4</sup>

When Jesus was born, all this land was under the rule of Herod, called the Great. Upon his death (4 B. C.), Idumea, Judea, and Samaria came, with the approval of the Romans and subject really to Roman control, under the government of Archelaus, the cruel son of Herod.<sup>5</sup> But, after ruling only ten years, Archelaus was, on complaint of his subjects, banished (6 A. D.) by Augustus, and the territory became a Roman province called Judea. Its governors, called procurators, although subject to the legate of Syria in exceptional cases, exercised judicial, fiscal, and military supremacy. In dealing with the Jews the procurators adhered as closely as possible to Jewish law, but the matter of capital punishment rested with the procurator, and only Roman citizens had the right of appeal from him to the emperor.

Of the Judean procurators who followed Archelaus, Pontius Pilate (26–36) is the best-known. According to Josephus he was indiscreet and somewhat cruel, while according to Philo he was very

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matt. 2:22.

obnoxious and merciless. His retention in office for ten years, however, suggests that he must have been satisfactory to Tiberius. Finally, owing to his excessive cruelty to the Samaritans, the people petitioned his superior, Vitellius, governor of Syria, and had him removed.

The two other main political divisions to be considered are: the tetrarchy of Galilee and Perea, ruled by Herod Antipas (4 B. C. to 39 A. D.), and that of Gaulonitis, Iturea, and some contiguous territory, ruled by Herod Philip (4 B. C. to 34 A. D.). These rulers, also the sons of Herod the Great and receiving their appointments as did Archelaus, were somewhat superior to him in the discharge of their office. Antipas, whose prosperous and fertile tetrarchy lay half on either side of the Jordan, was much like his father in shrewdness and in his general attitude toward the Jews, but he was built on a smaller model. His illegal marriage with Herodias was virtually his undoing. For, in setting aside his former wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia, he caused offense in that quarter, which, together with some boundary dispute, culminated in a disastrous war. Moreover, when, after the death of Philip in 34, Caligula granted to Agrippa I the title of king of Iturea, etc., this Herodias, ambitious that her husband should have as good a title as her brother, persuaded him to ask Caligula for the title of king. Thereupon Agrippa, who had ingratiated himself with the emperor, accused Antipas of being a rebel, and had him banished. Be it said to the credit of Herodias, however, that she followed him into exile. Antipas emulated his father in constructing many public works. Perhaps the most notable was the building of a new and beautiful capital city for Galilee, which he located on the western border of the lake, and named Tiberias in honor of the emperor.

Herod Philip, who was more virtuous and enjoyed greater peace than his brothers, ruled well the rugged country to the northeast. He rebuilt Pnias and named it Cæsarea Philippi, and Bethsaida which he called Julius in honor of the daughter of Octavius. He gave himself earnestly to the welfare of his tetrarchy, and died honored by all.

Independent of these tetrarchies, although situated within them, was the Decapolis, or federation of the ten cities. Scythopolis, on



PHYSICAL MAP OF PALESTINE

the west of the Jordan, was the capital of the group which lay scattered between Damascus and the Yarmuk. Each city had control of a certain amount of contiguous territory, was a center of Greek rather than of Jewish influence, and maintained its standing in the league for purposes of defense and commercial advantage. Among other cities, Gadara and Damascus had a place in this federation.

Such are some of the facts as to the political management of the country in the time of Jesus. Of that which is of even more importance than physical features and political conditions, the inhabitants of the land, and the interplay of sentiment and thought embodied in the relations of various contending parties, there is space for a word or two. Though the population of the land was predominantly Jewish—save, indeed, for the Samaritans, with whom, though they dwelt in the northern part of the province of Judea, the Jews had no dealings—yet Greeks also were numerous in Palestine, and had their own culture, which became increasingly influential in all the larger towns. Narrow, therefore, though the land, the currents of life that flowed through it were many and conflicting. Jew and Samaritan, Greek and Roman, dwelt within the narrow limits of the little state. Within the Jewish nation itself Hebraist and Hellenist, Pharisee and Sadducee and Essene, Zealot and Herodian, touched elbows in the streets of Jerusalem, and passed one another on the highways of the land. The combustibles for the fatal explosion of the year 70 were lying loose in the pathway of Christ's public ministry. No wonder he sought to avoid creating a noise in this land of incessant and headlong clamor. He was too much of a Jew to satisfy the growing Hellenism, but not enough to please the dominant Pharisaism. Indeed, he was infinitely too great a soul to be measured by the thumb-rule of their little system, or to be accounted for by the sum-total of those forces which through land and climate and people determined the earthly setting of his immeasurable life.